



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2024 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2024-290

Proposal Title: Ensuring Continued Access to Minnesota's Ornithological Records

Project Manager Information

Name: Michelle Terrell

Organization: Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Continued online access to statewide avian records and information maintained by the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union requires that the MOU contract with a website development vendor to modernize its custom website.

Funds Requested: \$175,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2026

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (H)

Secondary Category: Foundational Natural Resource Data and Information (A)

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Statewide

What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Narrative

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Continued access to the online database of statewide avian records and ornithological information maintained by the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union requires that the MOU contract with a website development vendor to modernize its website. The MOU began digitizing avian records as early as 1990 and launched its website soon after. The core of the current website is an open-source database of more than 19 million records documenting species seen or nesting in Minnesota from the mid-1800s through the present. The sightings database is used to generate other web pages containing detailed occurrence information, distribution maps, migration data and seasonal reports. These data are used in peer-reviewed publications and other literature. The website also supports the documentation and review of rare sightings, enabling long-term monitoring of changes in species distribution. Because the website evolved over many years, the continued functionality of this foundational data source is threatened by an unwieldy codebase, legacy technologies, security issues, and platform compatibility, among other concerns. As an all-volunteer organization, the MOU has been fortunate to have among its members a skilled computer scientist who has coded and maintained the website for decades, but who must retire from the position necessitating the hiring of an outside vendor.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

The Minnesota Ornithologists' Union seeks funding to contract a website development vendor to modernize its website. This project is necessary to ensure the continued functionality of the organization's online database of statewide avian records and ornithological information. In 2022, the MOU completed an analysis of its existing website and prepared a request for proposals outlining the project's technical goals and requirements. Key elements of this plan are modernization of the technology stack, organization of the codebase, and redesign of the databases. Design considerations include the creation of an improved user interface, addition of secure user roles, data privacy, and accessibility and inclusion. Fundamental to this undertaking is the preservation of all historical data.

Funding from the ENRTF will allow the MOU to contract with an outside vendor to provide the expertise necessary to modernize a complex custom website in order to ensure continued access to its statewide avian dataset and analytical tools. These data are open source and freely available to anyone wishing to use them, and are frequently referenced by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other organizations for the purposes of research, land management, and other conservation efforts and studies.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?

This project will ensure continued access to the MOU's online database of more than 170 years of Minnesota bird records. This database provides a powerful historical context for birds in our state and establishes the foundation for assessing changes in Minnesota's avifauna over time. These data aid in the identification of critical habitat and ecosystems in need of protection and provide a baseline for the evaluation of land management efforts. Further, the statewide scale of this database, coupled with its time depth, supports assessment of impacts from climate change. This project will ensure continued open-source access to this foundational data.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Vendor Solicitation and Selection; Website and Database Development; Website Launch

Activity Budget: \$175,000

Activity Description:

The MOU Board of Directors and Information Technology and Website committees will prepare an RFP for website development. Proposals will be solicited and evaluated in keeping with State contracting and competitive bidding requirements. Upon evaluation of qualified proposals, the IT and Website committees will forward their vendor recommendation to the MOU Board for approval and contracting of a work plan.

Design and development of the website and database will adhere to the work plan. Regular milestone achievement oversight and content review with the vendor will be directed by the Project Manager and a qualified team of MOU volunteers. The MOU will seek feedback from end users throughout this process. Prior to launch, the Website committee and other stakeholders will test the site over a multi-week period to document errors and verify functionality of the website and database.

The MOU will then launch the website and share with stakeholders and the public. The project incorporates a post-launch contract period to identify lingering issues requiring vendor remediation. The budget is based on preliminary vendor estimates received in 2022 adjusted for anticipated increased costs over a two-year period. All MOU planning, legal counsel, and review obligations will be performed on a volunteer basis.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Preparation of RFP, Vendor Solicitation, Interviews	October 31, 2024
Vendor Selection and Contract Execution	December 31, 2024
Development of Website and Database	December 31, 2025
Testing and Stakeholder Feedback	March 31, 2026
Launch of Modernized Website and Database	April 30, 2026
Post-launch Bug Fixes and Revisions	June 30, 2026

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

This project will result in the launch of an updated Minnesota Ornithologists' Union website and database with improved functionality and long-term viability that can be more readily maintained by the organization. Ongoing maintenance of the website will be undertaken by MOU volunteers and augmented with a website maintenance agreement with an outside vendor, as needed. Any related costs will be subsumed into the organization's annual budget.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Michelle Terrell

Job Title: MOU President

Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.

Michelle Terrell joined the board of the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union in 2020 and has served as the organization's Vice-President (2020 and 2021) and current President (2022 and 2023). In this capacity, Dr. Terrell is familiar with all operations of the MOU and the role that the organization's website has in the collection and dissemination of Minnesota's avian data. Dr. Terrell is also a member of the MOU's Information Technology Committee which analyzed the functionality and features of the organization's current website and prepared a plan for the implementation of a redesigned website and database. During the grant cycle, Dr. Terrell will be serving on the board of the MOU as Past President. From this position, Michelle will be able to oversee the contract vendor and coordinate with board members and committees in the implementation of the website. As a professional cultural resources management contractor, Dr. Terrell has extensive experience managing complex projects with multiple stakeholders.

Organization: Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

Organization Description:

The Minnesota Ornithologists' Union was formed in 1938 when three groups joined together to form a statewide birding organization. The purpose of the MOU is the promotion of a broad program of conservation and natural history study, primarily in the field of ornithology. To achieve this objective, the MOU fosters the science and study of Minnesota's birds and promotes the conservation of birds and their natural habitats across the state. The MOU maintains Minnesota's avian records and the state's official checklist of bird species in accordance with the guidelines of the American Ornithological Society. The MOU publishes "The Loon," a peer-reviewed quarterly journal on the birds of Minnesota, as well as a bimonthly digital newsletter, "Minnesota Birding." The organization also conducts field trips; encourages and sponsors the preservation of natural areas; and holds seminars where research reports, unique observations, and conservation discussions are presented. The MOU is a registered 501 (c)3 nonprofit incorporated with the State of Minnesota. Support for the organization comes from its membership (975 in March 2023), affiliated clubs, and special gifts. The MOU is privileged to house over a century and half of Minnesota bird records from thousands of observers in an open-source online database.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Website development vendor to complete development, testing, and launch of a modernized MOU website with Minnesota avian database.				-		\$175,000
							Sub Total	\$175,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								

							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$175,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
In-Kind	MOU Volunteer Match	The Project Manager, website team committee members (TBD), and website reviewers (TBD) will donate their time to project coordination; vendor oversight; status meetings; and QA/QC over a 1.5-year project (estimated value of donated volunteer time for 10 persons at 20 hours a month)	Pending	\$150,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$150,000
			Funds Total	\$150,000

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [96e3c639-378.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

In addition to text, three screen shots from the current Minnesota Ornithologists' Union website: (1) homepage, (2) sightings database query form, and (3) an example of detailed occurrence information. In upper left is the logo of the MOU with a Common Loon on the outline of the state of Minnesota....

Financial Capacity

File: [04d6a00f-dc7.pdf](#)

Optional Attachments

Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
Resolution from MOU Board of Directors	e52f713f-8e1.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, or sale of products and assets?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No

Does your project include the design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other capital asset costing \$10,000 or more?

No

Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services, as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7?

No

